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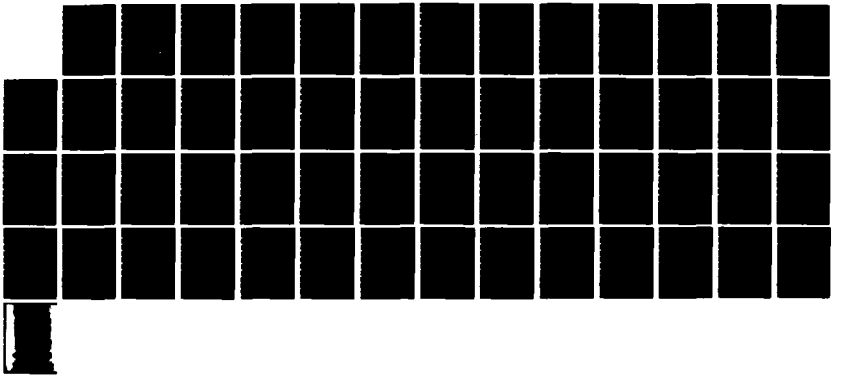

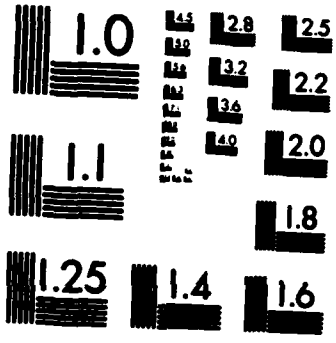

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POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN BENIN

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Following some seventy years of French colonial rule the Republic of Dahomey became an independent, sovereign state on August 1, 1960. The next twelve years were marked by political instability. Unlike in many African states, in Dahomey a single leader did not emerge to prominence in the early stages of independence to dominate political life. Instead, a three-partite ethno-regional political competition and maneuvering had ensued among three political actors, Hubert Maga, Sourou Migan Apithy, and Justin Ahomadegbe, each of whom soon commanded the loyalties of approximately one third of the country's population of about 3.5 million in 1983, each in three different regions of the country.

Ostensibly to quell incessant political bickering among the three leaders accompanied by ethnic and regional conflicts, military officers intervened six times. The Chief of the Dahomean Armed Forces, then Colonel Christoph Soglo intervened in 1963, to end the Presidency of Maga; Soglo intervened again twice in 1965, once to end an Apithy-Ahomadegbe government, and the second time to prevent the formation of a new two-partite coalition of two leaders against the third; Major Kouandete led a coup in 1967 to end General Soglo's rule, and again in 1969 to end the Presidency of Dr. Emil Derlin Zinsou, a medical doctor from the South-Western town of Ouida, whom the military itself entrusted with Presidential power. Lastly there

was the coup of 1972 by Major Mathieu Kerekou that terminated the triumvirate presidency of Maga-Ahomadegbe-Apithy, which lasted for just over two years.

October 26, 1984 will be the twelveth anniversary of Mathieu Kerekou's accession to power in the once "Republic of Dahomey," (he changed the name to become the People's Republic of Benin in november 1975). These twelve years without coups and government changes are impressive, for they are only three months shorther than the period of almost twelve years of chronic instability that reigned since independence. On the other hand one may argue, that these last twelve years have been politically stable only in the sense that the President Kerekou and his regime have not been replaced by another leader and another regime. For even during these last twelve years there have been plots and alleged plots against the regime in 1973, 1975, 1977; violence and demonstrations and disturbances in 1978 and 1981. Tranquility has not reigned in the country for twelve years. Nevertheless, from whatever perspective outsiders may wish to assess the durability of the Kerekou regime, one must take into accont that Beninese perceive these years to be stable vis a vis the turbulent years of the past. In all walks of life, whatever might be the degree of criticism of the regime and of the President, Beninese are impressed with Kerekou's staying-power. Many Beninese adults still vividly remember the military interventions of about every two years and the bitter factionalism that characterized the in-between years. They seem to appreciate the effectiveness of the present regime in dealing with actual and potential opposition without excessive use of force. Beninese may not support the regime, but many respect its achievements in these spheres. Respect does not in itself assure contiued stability. Nevertheless, popular perception of the last twelve years

diminishes the likelyhood of popular support for a prompt return to civilian rule because it forbodes political instability.

The two other prominent features of the Kerekou regime, alongside political stability, are the military being the source of power, and the prevalence of the Marxist-Leninist ideology since 1974. To the Beninese population at large both features are secondary and tertiary in importance. It does not mean that they approve ot either. However, it would be mistaken for outsiders to believe that in light of their experiences, African people have as much resentment against military rule as against colonial rule and against foreign rule that the Presidency of another ethnically supported leader symbolizes. Nor can Marxism be considered to have the same meaning for people that do not conceive of it in the context of the present East-West conflict as for people that do. Popular sentiments for or against military rule and Marxist ideology are far less intense in Benin than outsiders generally tend to assume.

On the other hand there are in Benin a few thousand educated elite, many of whom, due to education and exposure to the outside world, are committed to civilian rule and democracy in principle. To them military rule and Marxist ideology are too high a price to pay for political stability. Many among these are in self-exile abroad, several have been coopted by the regime in the wave of liberalization since 1981, while others are quietly waiting the turn of events.

These three features of the Peoples Republic of Benin: political stability, miliary rule, and marxist ideology; are easy to detect for they are on the surface. The historical forces on the other hand are complex and ramifications and implications to U.S. foreign policy are less evident and less

known. This may not be seen by some to be crucial. Benin is one of the less important countries in Africa and one of the poorest in the world. Whatever happens there may seem to be of little consequence. This is a mistaken view. Whatever happens in Benin is important in the African context. Benin is one African state where the African experience and experimentations with modern politics are played out. The various scenes are carefully watched by audiences in neighboring countries, in French speaking Africa and to a considerable extent, also from overseas. They must be carefully watched by policy makers in the United States too. To arrive at assessments of use for policymakers this paper will examine the Beninese political scene in an historical perspective. The principal questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. Why are ethnic and regional differences, the sources of political instability, not in evidence after 1972?

2. What has been the role of the military and how has it been able to attenuate ethnic conflicts in the past and under the Kerekou regime?

3. Why has the Kerekou regime turned to Marxist ideology and what role has ideology played in the country?

4. What are the prospects for political change in Benin?

Finally it must be noted at the outset that in this report the historical dimension of events, ideas, and views is emphasized because it is a necessary dimension for the attainment of a measure of understanding of the contemporary political scene in Benin. It is also to be forwarded that this paper presents an examination of socio-political factors to the exclusion of economic ones. Whatever else might be the shortcomings of this paper the

exclusion of an analysis of the Benin economy should not greatly detract from the completeness of the political pictures as long as the reader is aware of two basic facts about the Benin economy: First, that Benin has no large quantities of major marketable resources, with the possible exception of its educated people. Neither oil, nor minerals, nor agricultural products fall into this category. Consequently, Benin has always needed financial assistance to run the modern state and for the development of its modern economy. Changes that have taken place throughout the years have not altered in a meaningful way this basic economic situation. Secondly, an overwhelming majority of the population, probably as much as eighty percent, live, or supplement their livelyhood, from outside of the modern economy. This may include subsistence agriculture, internal and across-borders trade in products and manufactured goods, and the provision of traditional medical and ritual services. Thus drought, and an effective closing of say, the Nigerian border that stops smuggling may have a greater negative effect on the population as a whole although not on the salaried urban population, than the reduction of the annual budget or a restriction imposed on imports.

Chapter 2

Why Are Ethnic and Regional Differences, the Sources of Political Instability, Not in Evidence after 1972?

The overwhelming majority of sovereign states today and members of the United Nations are ethnically heterogenous. Japan is among the few exceptions to the rule, and there would be a few states, such as Somalia, where inclusion or exclusion from the list of heterogenous states would largely depend on the definition of the term ethnicity. Nevertheless, it would not be too difficult to reach a consensus among scholars that some 90-95% of the modern states in todays world including the People's Republic of Benin are ethnically heterogenous.

The ethnically heterogenous states may be further classified by various criteria. There are states in which there are two major ethnic groups (such as Malasia or Zimbabwe), and there are states with one major ethnic group and several minor ones (the Scandinavian countries). There are also ethnically heterogenous democratic, and stable countries (USA), and states where ethnicity had become a problem with the advent of democracy (Spain). And there is of course the ethnically heterogenous, non-democratic, and politically stable Soviet Union. One may list and isolate wide variety of factors and examine wide variety of cases, as many scholars have done, but no clearcut evidence can be found to support the view that ethnic diversity in itself is the cause or source of political instability. Neither has ethnic

diversity been the cause of political instability in Dahomey during the first twelve years of the Republic of Dahomey.

2.1 What is Political Instability?

Political instability may be defined as the irregular change of governments. This may be juxtaposed to political stability when a government is not replaced by another one or changed at regular legally prescribed intervals. Political instability then is negative, or undesirable because of the resultant internal and international uncertainty of sucessive government policies, and actions. Political stability, on the other hand may be seen as positive or desirable because it implies a certain degree of continuity. So defined, political instability need not mean forceful change of governments as political instability under the fourth French Republic did not. One may of course restrict the definition of political instability to irregular change of governments by violent and/or unconstitutional means. Such a restriction, nervertheless does not change the core definition of instability as irregular change of government.

Governments change irregularly if and when political actors are willing and able to bring about such a change. Government change is therefore a function of fighting or competition for political power . When the fight for political power is exercised and attained frequently and succesfully the result is political instability. For the successful attainment of power political actors need support. Such support may be military (to bring about a military coup), financial (to bribe or pay off other political actors, or pay

mercenaries) or civilian/popular support in relatively great numbers (to mobilize for strikes, demonstrations, riots, guerilla acts etc.) Disregarding here military and financial strength, citizen/ popular support may be mobilized to the degree that a political actor can utilize or create two conditions: a sense of discontent toward the existing political and/or social and/or economic situation in the given country; b. a conviction that the existing power holders are primarily to blame for the existing situation. Inversely, it is difficult to mobilize popular support if people are not discontented with their situation or if they do not blame their government (but, say, the supernatural, destiny, misfortune, or foreign powers.) The discontent and the conviction as to who is to be blamed may be exploited best by the creation of a clearcut dychotomy between "them" (those responsible for the situation) and "us" the discontented people. For the creation of such a dychotomy various differences between the blamed rulers and the discontented governed may be exploited. Among these are ideol l differences, class differences, wealth differences, sex differences, racial differences, religious differences, occupational differences and of course ethnic differences . Any of these differences may be exploited, but when ethnic differences do exist they tend to be among the first to be used probably because they reach back to people's memories. As we shall see this has been the case in most African states including Dahomey prior to 1972.

Ethnic differences are not the source of political instability in Dahomey or elsewhere but a means which can be used by political actors in competition for political power. Democracy (political parties, elections) legitimizes political competition in which one or more of the above listed

"differences" is utilized. When such political competition is not allowed, or suspended, or for any reason it does not exist, at least a relative degree of political stability and ethnic tranquility is more likely to prevail. This seems to be the present situation in the Peoples Republic of Benin.

2.2 Ethnic Diversity and Ethnic Hostilities

Ethnic conflicts in Dahomey do not stem from ethnic differences. The Yoruba-related people in Porto Novo do not oppose a Fon president in the country because the Fon culture is different (it is not so different in any case,) nor is the North-South split caused by mere differences between a "Christian" or westernized South and a Muslim-traditional North. Ethnic conflicts stem from people's collective memories of real or fictionalized historic relations and attitudes formed in hundreds of years of migrations and ensuing relations among the various groups. While leaders and elites may be motivated by strictly "modern" factors (such as a political ideology) their potential supporters are more likely to be mobilized against an historic enemy. It may be useful here to account for, and to a degree speculate about, the source of these traditional, historic, enmities, in order to better understand contemporary Benin.

Ethnic memories are complex and may reach in some instances back to times immemorial. There is little hope for an outsider to account accurately for the total picture. One may only attempt to point to a few probable cases and their contemporary implications.

In pre-colonial times the latecomer and expansionist Abomey Kingdom

was an aberration to both the more ancient Oyo (Yoruba) and Porto Novo Kingdoms, which resulted in the latter's numerous wars against Abomey. These wars may at least in part explain the closeness and the lasting political allience between the Goun and Yoruba Porto-Novians against the "uptight" Fon. This hostility was reinforced by the pattern of the French penetration in the late 19th century. In 1868 and 1878 the French signed treaties with Glele the King of Dahomey, or Abomey, a traditional African kingdom in the southern part of the independent state of today. In 1883 the Porto Novo Kingdom became a French Protectorate. Both feuding partners, Abomey and Porto Novo, thought that the French were siding with them against attacks from the other. Then, to the Porto-Novians delight, the French conquered Abomey in 1893 and expelled its king. This conquest became an added factor to the traditional political feud and mistrust between the two regions Porto Novo,in the South East and Abomey in the center of the country.

The Mahi country, (Dassa, Save region), north of Abomey, had been a slave raiding ground for the Abomey Kingdom as well as for the Oyo Kingdom. Squeezed between the Fon in the south, the Yoruba in the East, and the Bariba country in the North, the Mahi traditionally resented all of them and may have developed a feeling of inferiority toward them and an urge for revenge. Practically all of the Marxist ideologues of today come from this Dassa-Save region.

The Somba people live in the North-West of the country. They have been considered "primitives" and "savages" probably because for long into the 20th century, even after independence, Somba men used to go around in their villages practically nude. Hubert Maga was a teacher in the Somba

country, in Natitingu, in the 1940's and undoubtedly encouraged many young Somba children to pursue their education. One of these children may have been Mathieu Kerekou who was born in 1933. Later Kerekou became Maga's aide de camp and incidentally, carried out the 1972 coup, after Maurice Koundate who is, according to one account, Kerekou's brother, was sentenced to death and thus prevented his execution. (see West Africa, 14 November 1983).

The Bariba in the North West Borgou region, who are related to groups in Nigeria just accross today's international border, consider themselves to be the descendants of ancient semitic tribes from the Middle East. Their historic myths are very much unlike those of the other Dahomeans. Their traditional social and political system was of a feudal type, quite unlike other groups in Dahomey. They owned and rode horses, had trade routes parallel to and away from the sea, not toward it, they were exposed to Islam not to Christianity. They had virtually nothing in common and nothing to do with the peoples that lived in the South. As horse-riding warriors they would have been invincible enemies to southerners, if the latter ever tried to counter them. The Bariba horses in turn could not have survived in the southern climate because of the tse-tse fly. Probably in all respects they were as strange and foreign to each other as the conquering Europeans were to both.

In the 1870's several treaties were signed by French officers with various local chiefs in the North (Nikki, Parakou etc), but these were seen by the local chiefs as treaties of friendship and no more. Consequently, the actual French military penetration to the north was resisted in most places in the North by large segments of populations (but not for example by the

former Gando slaves of the Bariba rulers.) The "pacification" of the north was completed by the turn of the century. But then came a second wave of resistance in 1915 against what were seen as abuses by French colonial administration carried out by Southern Dahomeans. The Northerners did feel obliged to pay taxes and otherwise submit to the French colonial rulers who defeated them in the battles of the 1890's. But they objected to the presence of Africans from the South. They felt they were having to submit to a double foreign colonization of French governors and rulers and Southern administrators and teachers. There were two major revolts in the North. One in the North-West around Bimbereke and Nikki and the other in the North East around Natitingou by a Somba sub-group. Both revolts lasted for over two years, and were defeated by the French, but remained in the historical memories of the two peoples of the Bariba and the Somba as brave resistances to the double foreign domination.

In 1904 Dahomey was incorporated into the French West African Federation and the colonial rulers used direct and indirect rules interchangeably in the various administrative devisions into which the territory was divided. In 1945 electoral reforms were introduced and subsequently elections were held. But no ethnic conflict ensued immediately mainly because there was little political competition in these early years. Formal education was one of the requirements for the eligibility to vote, thus voters from the North were rare and far between. There was but one political party, the UPD (Union Progressiste Dahomeenne) which was totally dominated by southerners. Also, in the 1946 elections to the French National Assembly there was only one deputy alloted to Dahomey and Togo together on the African subjects list. Later to become President, Apithy

was nominated by the only party and was elected. For the elections to the Dahomean General Council, a Territorial Assembly, Dahomey was divided into six electoral districts each to elect councilors proportional to the number of its inhabitants. The six districts were: 1. Porto Novo and environs (Goun and Yoruba country); 2. Cotonou, Ouida, Allada (Fon); 3. Abomey and its environs (Fon country); 4. Savalou and environs (Mahi); 5. Natitingou (Somba and related groups); 6. Northeast (Bariba). Each district elected its native sons. There was also a separate citizens list where future President Emil Derlin Zinsou ran, and lost. There was very little political competition in 1945-46 and hence one cannot find in this election significant signs of ethnic or regional rivalry. In 1947 a new party was formed in Abomey, the BPA (Bloc Populaire Africain) founded by some of the candidates defeated in the 1946 elections.

Regionalism, and ethnic rivalries emerged in the 1951 elections when a degree of political awareness was reached in the North. It may be instructive to examine the workings of these elections in some detail because the pattern that emerged here and in the elections of 1956 have continued and prevailed until the coup of 1972.

In 1946 Hubert Maga was a teacher in Natitingou when he was elected to the Dahomean General Council mentioned above on the UPD ticket. By this time, at age 30 he had already frequented schools in Parakou, Bohicon, Abomey, Porto Novo and the William Ponty Teacher-training school in Senegal where he became a friend and later political ally of Hamani Diori of Niger. He then returned to teach first in Parakou and then in Natitingou, both northern towns. Thus by the end of World War II Maga had lived in the South as well as abroad and had acquired an experience quite

rare at that time in the North.

In 1948 the BPA, (founded, as noted above, in 1947 by candidates defeated in the 1946 elections), opened a branch in Natitingou and thus posed a challenge to the UPD there as well as to Maga's dormant political ambitions. But for years still the political status quo was not changed since there were no elections, and hence there was no open political competition. Then on June 17, 1951 Dahomey was to elect two deputies to the French National Assembly. The electoral law published in May stipulated that political parties, that wish, may present two candidates. One elected deputy would be the candidate listed first on the party list receiving the highest number of votes; the second elected deputy would be the candidate listed first on the list of the party receiving the second highest number of votes. (Unless one party receives twice as many votes as any other party.) The northern members of the still multi-ethnic UPD wanted a northerner to be one of the two candidates of the party. At the same time both Apithy and Zinsou demanded that their names be listed first on the Party ticket. No agreement coulde be reached on either issue and Apithy, Maga and Zinsou each formed their own parties and listed themselves first. Maga formed the Groupement Ethnic du Nord (GEN) and presented the list of Maga-Paul Darboux; Apithy left the UPD and under the banner of Union Francaise presented himself first with the European Edouard Dunglas in second place; and Zinsou with Gilbert Kpakpo ran on the UPD ticket. The election results were as follows: Union Francaise (Apithy)- 53,463 votes of which 64% came from the Porto Novo region and 2.2% from the North; Groupement Ethnique du Nord (Maga)-49,329 votes- 98% from the North; UPD (Zinsou)-18,410 votes, mainly from the cercle of Ouida. Three additional lists received

fewer votes. Thus Apithy, first on the Union Fracaise list, and Maga, first on the GEN list, receiving the highest number of votes, were elected. In July Apithy renamed his party The Parti Republicaine du Dahomey (PRD). At the meeting held to approve the constitution of the Party 49 of the 55 persons present were either Goun or Yoruba including the King of Porto Novo.

A similar pattern of maneuvering was repeated in the 1952 and 1957 elections to the Territorial Assembly (formerly the General Council) and at the 1956 elections to the French National Assembly. By the time of independence in 1960 the Dahomean pattern of regionalism was fully evolved. It was a three-partite division, North, Center, South, in which any coalition of two against a third was acceptable for the sole purpose of preventing the dominance of any other leader and region. By 1957 it had become clear that the electoral strength of each leader was firm, and that the size of the electoral strength was approximately one third of the electoral votes in Dahomey.

This three-partite regionalism in Dahomean modern politics emerged and remained the essential pattern because it reflected historical patterns and relations. It does not mean that a four or five partite regionalism (for example if the North were to politically split into two, North East and North West, and/or the South were to split into a Porto Novo Region and a Oida and Mono region) could not have emerged. In fact Zinsou's support from Ouida region could be seen to represent a four-partite split. The point is that ethnic diversity exists historically and can be mobilized in and for the purposes of political competition. Regionalism exists not because each region is culturally and in many other ways different from the others, but

because of the existing historic relations, attitudes, prejudices of each other that can exploit these divisions. As outlined above, there are sufficient negative elements in the historical memories of each region for its inhabitants not to want to be ruled by "them" and to see the undesirability of such an eventuality. "Our" loss in an election is the victory of the "them" over "us". A loss is not only a political loss, but also a loss of pride. To put it inversely: it is not as important to win as it is crucial not to lose to the historically despised "them". Thus later having the military in power is certainly not a victory for "us" but, more importantly it is not a victory for the "them". Furtheremore, when the leader of the other region is in power,"our" region is to be mobilized to terminate it one way or another. Against the military one cannot mobilize so easily not only because the military have weapons (a civilian regime utilizes military forces as well), but mainly because the military does not necessarily represent a clearcut "them", against which an "us" can automatically emerge.

Before we focus on the military in some detail there is one more issue to examine. It is the question of the uniqueness of Dahomey's instability prior to 1972. Although there has been political insatbility and military interventions in other African states, it seems that Dahomey has often been pointed to as a special case because of its longstanding three-partite regionalism and its relatively large number of coups. Is Dahomey unique or at least significantly different from other African states with regard to political instability?

What makes Dahomey different from most if not all African states is that in Dahomey no civilian leader was successful in excluding all other potential leaders from the political process at an early enough stage. In

many other African states one political leader succeeded in excluding others from the political scene either by the use of force or by political maneuvering.

One would have great difficulty in trying to sustain the argument that the three Dahomeean leaders Apithy, Ahomadegbe, and Maga were more committed to the democratic process than the other African leaders and that they intentionally left the three partite political competition in Dahomey intact. There is considerable evidence to show that each of the three leaders tried continuously to exclude the other two from the political arena but they failed to do so. The French connection may explain the failure of any of the Dahomean leaders to accomplish what other African leaders, at least in the French-speaking African countries, have accomplished. While in other African colonies the French made an early committment and provided support to one, ussually prominent, African leader, such as Leopold Sedhar, Senghor, Hamani Diori, Houphouet Boigny, and even to Sylvanus Olympio, in Dahomey they did not make the choice, or made the choice but did not provide sufficient support, either because none of the Dahomean leaders was similarly prominent or reliable, or because Dahomey was not considered to be important enough.

Thus the three political leaders continued to compete with each other in open elections and have weaved various schemes to attain and then retain the presidency at other times. Since the country's economic situation had always been precarious and a degree of discontent had always been prevalent, it was not very difficult for the leaders out of the Presidential palace to mobilize ethnic sentiments against the President. This situation continued until 1972.

After 1972 several things happened that reduced political instability in Dahomey. First, the three major political leaders had been excluded from the government and from the political scene in general. This act terminated the long standing pattern of political competition. Secondly, the sense of discontent was reduced by radical structural changes (such as nationalization of enterprises), promises and slogans. Thirdly, the source of the undesirable political, social and economic situation was diverted away from the government to foreign elements (imperialism, the former coloniser, discredited nationals in self-exile in foreign lands). In, sum in Benin during the post 1972 period while the ethnic and regional diversity has remained unchanged, the primary actors in political competition were neutralized and the two necessary conditions that any aspiring political actor can utilize, had been minimized.

Chapter 3

The Military

Between 1963 and 1972 there were six military interventions, or military coups in Dahomey. These terms sound impressive and the number sounds significant. Using these numbers and terms Dahomey appears as a worthy contender for world championship. But a closer examination of the role of the military in Dahomey may alter this image. For an American, the participation of military in politics, in whatever form, through whatever means, for whatever reason, is unacceptable. To a proponent of democracy civilian rule, however authoritarian, seems potentially democratic; military rule however moderate, is seen by definition as authoritarian. Civilian regime connotes the rule of law; military rule connotes force. Military at all times must be submitted to civilian control. For a proponent of democracy the essence of civility is the neutralization of brute force that, in light of past history, the military represents.

This author unequivocally supports this view in a general sense. Nevertheless one should not leave military interventions and rule in Africa unexamined in the context of <u>African</u> realities if the aim is the understanding of African politics . The view that origins and consequences of military intervention anywhere the same is debatable. At least the military role in Dahomean politics ought to be examined by different

criteria.

The first military intervention in Dahomey occured on October 28,1963. On that day Colonel Christoph Soglo, Commander of the Dahomean Armed Forces, appeared in front of cheering crowds in Cotonou and declared that the army had taken over, the government of President Maga was dissolved and the first Constitution of independent Dahomey was suspended. These are the facts and on the face of it they amount to a military intervention. One may now be inclined to proceed and describe the second military coup which occured in 1965. But one could pause, as we shall do, to examine closer the events that led to the 1963 coup and the coup itself. For the sake of brevity we will first list some of the factors that one ought to take into consideration.

First, for several days prior to the military takeover there were widescale demonstrations and strikes in the streets of Cotonou as part of Apithy and Ahomadegbe supporters' efforts to frustrate what seemed to them to be President Maga's attempt to consolidate his rule, and eliminate his political rivals.

Secondly, already on October 26, a day after President Maga returned from an official tour in the Far East, it was clear that the demonstrations would turn violent if Maga stayed in power, and that the North would rebell if any of the other two civilian leaders succeeded him in the Presidency. On the same day truckloads of Northern archers arrived in Cotonou to confront the southern demonstrators and the soldiers if necessary.

Thirdly, Colonel Soglo's declaration on October 28 was made after two days of consultations among President Maga, Vice-president Apithy, Trade

Union leaders as well as Colonel Soglo and Lieutenant Colonel Aho, who was the second highest ranking officer in the Dahomean military after Soglo. The military takeover was not a sudden event, no army units were mobilized, no fire was shot. Thus the salient feature of the "october revolution" was not the military intervention, but the strikes, demonstrations and counter demonstrations. Underneath all was the purported attempt by Maga and the North to consolidate power, and, conversely, the efforts of organized labor and Apithy's supporters to prevent it. The military did not terminate the functioning of the elected civilian government; the "October Revolution" as it was baptised at once, did. The military did not step in to stop civilian rule, but to stop an eruption of violent ethno-regional conflict. In October 1963 there existed a real threat of civil war between the North and the South. After the military intervention Soglo together with Maga travelled to the North in a hurry to calm the spirits there. One may also add that immediately on October 28 a constitutional commission was set up; a new constitution was adopted in a referendum already in January 1964; and in February 1964 elections were held and the military handed over the government to elected civilians.

In November 1965 the military intervened again. But the seeds of this new military intervention were sewn already in Jauary 1964, for the new constitution was tailored to fit Apithy and Ahomadegbe, President and Vice-President respectively, while former President Maga was in detention accused of plotting to assasinate the two others. Under the January 1964 constitution Apithy and Ahomadegbe formed a new party that received 99.8% of the votes. These numbers notwithstanding the opposition to the new government continued. The danger of uprising in the North existed

throughout 1964 and 1965. In May 1965 new arrests were made for plotting to overthrow the government and the economic situation, which we are not concerned with here, continued to deteriorate.

Thus the November 1965 military intervention was again due to the attempt of consolidating power, now by Apithy as well as by Ahomadegbe. While President Apithy was in Paris, Vice-President Ahomadegbe passed a law concerning the appointment of the members of the supreme court. On his return Apithy refused to sign the law. The single political party in which both leaders were members, but controled by Ahomadegbe, asked Apithy to resign from the presidency. He refused, and Ahomadegbe decided to remove Apithy himself. He donned a military uniform and wanted to lead an army detachment to remove Apithy from the Presidential palace. Colonel Soglo met Ahomadegbe accidentally in the outskirts of Porto Novo and was angered by the sight of him in uniform. Soglo returned to Camp Guezo in Cotonou,the major military camp, called together the senior officers and together they decided to demand the resignation of both Apithy and Ahomadegbe. On November 29, 1965 they both did resign. Following the letter of the Constitution in such an eventuality the President of the National Assembly, Tahirou Congacou, became the temporary President. He freed the Northerners from prison and in consultation with all three political leaders he set out to write a new constitution. The plan was to hold new elections before January 18, 1966.

This did not come about. Since a new variation of the two against one game, now Apithy and Maga against Ahomadegbe, was about to emerge, the supporters of Ahomadegbe, especially the trade unions, protested. Also a Syndicat Dahomeen de l'Enseignement Secondaire, that did not exist

before, circulated a tract demanding that the three leaders retire from politics and that a "revolutionary committee" be constituted under the protection of the army. Demonstrators on the streets of Porto Novo shouted "The Army to power". On December 22, 1965 now General Soglo formed a government of technocrats, i.e. a government of civilians, plus himself as President and head of government and appointed Colonel Aho as minister of interior, security and defense.

Military intervention? Certainly. But it is also clear that hardly any peacefull civilian alternative existed at the time, and that there was a demand, at least from some corners, for the military to intervene. One must also add that the French must have been acting behind the scenes. Dahomey's economic situation was precarious to say the least and France had the economic cards. This author has no information on the precise role and weight of the French (or any other foreign) power, but the probability is great that the French played a role in addition to the internal forces present.

The fourth coup came two years later in December 1967. By this time several junior officers were promoted in the ranks who were critical both of the military conduct of the two senior officers as well as of their handling of the affairs of state. By this time there were also rumors of widespread corruption in the military (especially smuggling of liquor accross the Togolese border) and complaints by several of the officers that the corruption was not stopped by the undecisive chief of the Armed forces. In March 1967 the government set up a Comite Militaire de Vigilance to carry out "periodic exminations of the actions of all the state instituions in the political, economic, and social areas." (Journal Officiel du Dahomey, June

1, 1967.)

Immediately preceding the takeover on December 17, 1967 there were strikes by the Teachers Union which were immediately joined by striking workers protesting the economic conditions. The government responded with arrests of the leaders, but then released them. On December 16 the strike ended, but not the country's economic problems. It was clear that strikes and demonstrations were bound to continue. However the next day, at noon, the "young officers of the army", led by Major Maurice Koundate announced on the radio that the Soglo regime was overthrown.

Can we detect in this coup a manifestation of the ambitions of the junior officers in the military? It appears quite evident that the Sogolo regime was ineffective both in solving internal problems in the army and in attacking the economic ills of the country. The government of technicians inaugurated in Janury 1966 gradually changed into a civilian government reflecting the existing political divisions. More significant may be the fact in this context, that exactly one month after the December coup the young officers published a timetable of measures to be taken before return to civilian rule by June 16, 1968, i.e. six months after the takeover. No internal Dahomean factor forced them to do that, which does not exclude the strong possibility that the French did. It may or may not have been their own initiative to ban the three civilian leaders, Apithy, Ahomadegbe and Maga to participate in the new elections as prescribed by the new constitution adopted in a referendum on March 31, 1968. The Supreme Court ruled the ban unconstitutional and Apithy and Maga urged the citizens to boycott the elections. The military overruled the ban and the elections were won by one Basil Adjou Moumuni, a medical doctor, who spent almost

his entire adult life outside of the country and was a completely unknown entity. He received 82% of the votes cast by 26% of the eligible voters. (Ahomadegbe did not call for a boycott, and his supporters might have constituted the voting 26%). Understandebly the elections were annuled and the officers, (heeding to the advice of the French?) conferred the power to Emil Derlin Zinsou for "at least five years." He was invested as President on July 17, 1968, after being approved in a referendum of 75% of the 73 % of the electorate participating. On August 1, the military returned to the barracks 44 days later than they themselves had scheduled.

In 1968 the "return to the barracks" did not even intend to mean a retreat from the political scene. The officers inserted into the new constitution a clause stating that although the President is the Chief of the "Armies", the army "guarranties" the regime (Article 39). By 1968 the military "matured" to institutionalize itself as a political factor. No doubt the role of the military in neighboring Nigeria, at this time already in the midsts of the Biafra war, as well as the role of the military in other African states, may have influenced the Dahomean officers' position and attitudes as much as the internal situation in the country. It may also be remarked that at that time the military did not appear to be the proponents of any particular ideology. In the constitution and declarations they called for national unity, for the participation in the reconstruction of the nation, for the awakening of the conscience of the people through education and the like. The constitution also called for a single party, not a single revolutionary party, but one that "prevents historical political feuds". Undoubtedly, their proven capacity to intervene in politics to shape political institutions, as well as the future of the country gave them an amount of

self- confidence and a sense of self-importance. However these were the events since 1963 and before, rather than the men, that carved out a specific place for the military in the life of the country. It was not their ambitions which put them in the peak of power; being in power embued them with ambitions to play more and deeper roles. And if it is true that the French and other foreign power blocked their ambitions in 1967, it is conceivable that ways were sought to neutralize this or these outside factors the next time around.

The next time came in December 10,1969, sixteen months into Zinsou's presidency. The leader of the coup was again Maurice Kaoudate now as a Lieutenant Colonel.

This was the first coup, the first military intervention in the classic (western?) sense. Here the military was not opted in, for there was no special government crisis. Here force was used, the President's car was sprayed with bullets, and uninjured, he was forcefully pulled out, from the car and flown from the nearby Cotonou airport to Natitingou, Kouandate's hometown. This was also very likely to have been a one-man show of an ambitious person. This coup was also the outward manifestation of internal quarrels in the military officer's corps, which had intensified since the coup of 1967. These internal quarrels had more to do with personality differences and accusations of corruption than ethnic differences. One of the central issues of corruption was known as the "Kovacs Affair". Kovacs was a French businessman who sold office supplies to various ministries and reportedly handed out large kickbacks to people, including officers, during Zinsou's regime. The affair was a central one since 1968 and played a role in the coups of 1969 and 1972 as well.

Zinsou's sixteen months in office were not without turbulence. There were student demonstrations in December 1968 to January 1969 protesting the reduction of scholarships to study abroad (Dahomey inaugurated its University only in 1970); riots by workers protesting the reduction of family allowences, plot accusations against Ahomadegbe's followers and, by Koundate, against Lieutenant Colonel Alley who was dismissed from the military already in September 1968 and was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for the attempted coup in July 1969.

Following the 1969 coup a Military Directorate was formed (composed of the officers De Souza, Sinzogan and Kouandete) and new elections were announced, now with the participation of the three former leaders, as well as Zinsou. In other words political competition was opened again. The voters were to go to the polls twice, once to elect a President among the four candidates, and the second time to elect members of the National Assembly. The Presidential elections produced the expected results: Maga won in the North (252,551 votes), Ahomadegbe in the Center (200,091 votes), Apithy in the South East (186,332 votes) and Zinsou in the region of Ouida received 17,551 votes. Following the familiar pattern, Apithy and Maga offered to form a coalition with Zinsou to isolate Ahomadegbe. Zinsou rejected the offer. Maga declared that the North "would not submit again to the yoke of the South" and threatened to secede if the military Directorate did not accept the election results which would put him into the Presidency. Apithy in turn threatened to attach his region to Nigeria if the Directorate would ratify Maga in the Presidency. By the end of March 1970 the country was again at the brink of a civil war.

The Presidential Council, formed of the three leaders and rotating the

Presidency among themselves, starting with Maga; then Ahomadegbe; then Apithy; every two years, was a compromise arrived at probably the last minute before violence erupted. If one again takes into account the probability of French pressure on the military not to stay in power, the "triumvirate" or "troika" type arrangment was probably the only option available. It seems certain that Kouandate at least would have very much liked to stay in power had he had the choice. He probably would have overcome the likely opposition to his Presidency within the military (he succeeded in neutralizing Colonel Alley), but the economic dependence of Dahomey on France was too heavy to resist French opposition to the military in power.

On may 7, 1970 the civilian government sworn in and the Military Directorate dissolved itself. In order to mute internal conflicts, the highest echelons of the military reorganized themselves so as to create a decentralized body. Colonel Alley became the secretary-general of National Defense, and Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Kouandete became his adjutant. Lieut. Colonel Paul Emile De Souza became Army Chief of Staff, and Lieutenant-Colonel Benoit Sinzogan was named Chief of Staff of the Gendarmerie. Major Mathieu Kerekou was appointed to be the adjutant to De Souza and Major Bartholemy Owens the adjutant of Sinzogan. This reorganization was not enough to prevent two mutinies in the Ouida military camp, one on January 28, 1972 (when the troups deposed the base commander, Major Rodrigues), the other on February 23,1972, (an attempt to assasinate De Souza). As a result Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Kouandete, along with three other military men (Captains Josue and Glele and Quartermaster Sergeant Agboton), were arrested, tried and condemned to

death.

On May 7, 1972 the Presidency rotated from Maga to Ahomadegbe and on October 26, 1972 the civilian rule was terminated by the last military coup up to now.

Why did the military terminate the life of the Presidential Council which the army itself had instituted? And, if judging by the rotation that did take place as scheduled, why did it terminate a system that worked? It is difficult to provide an answer to this question, if a single answer exists at all. By 1972 the Dahomean military was a complex institution, with a rich past that included crucial roles in the life of the country. One must also consider the precedence of military coups in other African states, Dahomey's disasterous economic situation, mounting corruption and the interminable political intrigues among political actors. Among the most suspected factors that may explain the 1972 military takeover, ethnic rivalry in the country or in the military, and the personal ambition of Mathieu Kerekou, are probably the minor ones. Although the 1972 coup may be seen as an attempt by one Somba (Kerekou) to save another (Kouandate) from execution, it may also be seen, probably more correctly, as an attempt by military officers to save the life of another officer condemned to death by a civilian court in a highly controversial judicial procedure. As far as Kerekou's ambitions are concerned, from all accounts it appears that not Kerekou or at least not he alone initiated the coup, and that he was chosen by his peers to head it, after Lieutenant Colonel De Souza and Sinzogan declined the honor.

It may be more correct to see the coup as a step taken by the senior

officers to forestall a planed coup by junior officers who wished to bring about a radical change in the country which to them appeared to have plunged into a situation no longer bearable or acceptable. What seemed most objectionable to many young Dahomean intellectuals and the young army officers is what appeared to them as a degrading economic and political dependence on France, which in their eyes the older generation of politicians and officers accepted as inevitable. Not only subsidies to scholarships depended on French largess, but the country's budget depended on French willingness to subvent it. Not only the civilian leaders sought support from the French for their political schemes, but, in the eyes of young and militant Dahomeans, even the army had to bow to French pressure to hand back the government to the defunct regional politicians of the past.

Any assessment of the role of the military in Dahomey must take into account the fact that willingly or not, rightly or not, they have become and have considered themselves to be the arbiters of power and the source of legitimacy probably since as early as 1967. In the Dahomean army ethnic differences, personal rivalries, promotional issues were accentuated because the army has evolved to become a political factor in the life of the country. Initially the officers were predominantly from among the Fon because of the preferences of the French colonial administrators to recruit the descendants of the brave warriors or the Abomey Kingdom. It might follow from here that in subsequent years officers from other ethnic groups had been fighting against this Fon dominance in the army. This may have been the case after Kouandate's 1969 coup, when he practically purged southern officers, but not necessarily so at earlier times. Another argument

may be that officers formed cliques at times accross ethnic lines. That is correct, but these cliques were formed and dissolved in changing circumstances and have not remained constant political forces. One overriding factor that must be taken into account is that the about two or three scores of higher ranking officers at any given time knew each other intimately, each was familiar with each other's strength and weaknesses, ties, tastes and personal lives. Consequently, the political behaviour of the officers could not have been seen by the other officers in a rigid ethnic pattern, but in a much wider and more complex setting. Thus Kouandete was resented by most other officers most probably because he was ambitious, arrogant, power hungry and probably the only one who did not consult with other officers before a coup. Sinzogan, on the other hand was seen as quiet, cautious and professional. De Souza too was considered apolitical and a supporter of Zinsou because of the latter's distaste for the military's involvement in politics. Michel Alladaye, Hilaire Badjagoume, Michel Aikpe and Janvier Assogba have been viewed as the "young turks" with ambitions for radical change, probably at whatever prize. One may continue to account for each and every officer, which would likely lead to the conclusion that the Dahomean military was not and is not now a homogenous body, but, inspite of their similar military formation, it is a collection of men with varied personalities, views, and goals. It would be a gross error to assume, if to judge from the past, that each and every officer's and NCO's ambition has been to become the ruler of his country. One should not generalize. Soglo, Alley, Sinzogan, De Souza and Kerekou probably did not cherish such ambitions, but Kouandate, Hacheme, Chasme and probably a few others did and several others still do.

Chapter 4

The Role Of Ideology

Two years after his successful coup, Lieutenant-Colonel Mathieu Kerekou proclaimed on November 30, 1974 that Dahomey (since 1975 the Peoples Republic of Benin) was launched on a socialist path, founded on Marxism-Leninism and engaged in the task of attaining a Popular Democratic Revolution. A party of the Benin Popular Revolution was formed, and Marxist-Leninist slogans were introduced. Relations with Lybia, the Soviet Union and other East European countries were established or strengthened. In international organizations Benin at once gravitated toward the Communist Block countries. Did Benin turned communist in 1974? A core of radical, militant ideologues whose might and influence has long been brought to bear to bring about a radical change, had for long existed in the country. They prevailed in 1974. Nevertheless, Marxism-Leninism in Benin is skin deep; the body has remained African, or Beninese, i.e. an amalgam of views and tendencies. Marxism was adopted by Kerekou at a given moment because he was practically forced to do so, and it has been maintained to a deree because it has been functional. In the absence of rooted democratic institutions, in the absence of the single civilian leader with the aura of a founding father capable of maintaining political stability such as Houphouet Boigny, and because an authoritatian military ruler, such as Mubutu, who also brought stability in Zaire, have failed to emerge, in Benin Marxist

ideology has been for over a decade the dominant stabilizing factor for three reasons. First, because it has neutralized the radicals as a trouble making political force; second, the slogans project a new, better and just Benin society; third, radical slogans deflect blame for economic hardship from the government to external factors such as imperialism, neocolonialism, multinationals etc. The realistic alternative to the marxist ideology in Benin is either interminable ethno-regional conflicts and the continued threat of civil war as in previous times, or personal dictatorship. Either one of the alternatives might lead to more human suffering than the present regime inflicts. At the same time under the veneer of Marxist slogans there has emerged a modicum of liberalization that may continue to spread and change the face of the regime in the long run.

Why and how has the Benin regime turned Marxist? There are three pillars of militant radicalism in Benin, all of which reach back in time. The one is trade union radicalism, or the Syndicalist radicalism; the second is the radicalism of "intellectuals", and the third pillar is a specific group of young intellectuals called the Ligueurs. Let us examine each of them in turn.

The first trade unions in Dahomey were branches of the international trade union movement during colonial times. In 1957 Sekou Toure of Guinea organized an inter-territorial African Trade Union movement in French speaking Africa in order to break away from colonial domination. UGTAN was founded at a Conference in January 1957 in Cotonou and the workers in Dahomney were at once incorporated into it. Since most of the workers and the union leaders in Dahomey were from among the Fon at the time, the emerging unofficial Fon leader, Ahomadegbe, had easy access to the union as a political ally. Due to Sekou Toure's radical, Marxist-leaning stand

UGTAN had become anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist and quasi-Marxist; due to UGTAN's alliance in Dahomey with Ahomadegbe's UDD party, radicalism spread to the party as well. In these early days radicalism did not amount to much more than a willingness to get out in support of workers rights. For example in January 1958 UGTAN declared a general strike in Dahomey in support of striking workers in a palm-oil refinery north of Porto Novo. Ahomadegbe used this opportunity to go after Apithy who was then the Vice-President of the Dahomean Government Council (the French governor was the President). After violent clashes with the police Apithy resigned. The Union Generale des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire (UGTAN) split and disappeared with independence. UGTAN in Dahomey became Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Dahomey (UNSTD). In October 1960 a meeting of the Council of the Entente took place in Cotonou with the participation of Houphouet-Boigny, Ahomadegbe's classmate and friend at the medical school in Dakar, Senegal, where Ahomadegbe trained as a dentist. Houphouet-Boigny pressured Maga at the meeting to align with his friend Ahomadegbe. The UDD supported UNSTD pressed the point in a general strike, and violent demonstrations on the streets of Cotonou. The efforts failed. UNSTD was banned by Maga and its members were forced to join the Maga government sponsored Union Generale des Travaileurs du Dahomey (UGTD). But Maga did not succeed in crushing the militantism of the Union and, in 1963 they were instrumental in overthrowing him.

Although union leaders such as Theophile Paoletti, Jacob Padonou and others were not marxist ideologues, through the utilization of union slogans against government corruption, for the elevation of the standard of living of the workers, "normalization" of trade relations with all the countries of the

world (including the Eastern block countries), for reducing the dependence on France, Dahomean Trade Unions became an ideological pillar to use and to rely on.

The second pillar of militant radicalism were the groups of teachers and various other intellectuals formed at various times in France and imbued with differing amounts of socialist or quasi socialist ideas so characteristic of their French counterparts. In the 1960's Joseph Degla, Richard Dogbe, Spero Adotevi were active in and out of government for the promotion of radical ideas and changes. A group of intellectuals launched in 1968 the journal Kpengla (name of the bell that announces the coming of the King) that sounded radical views. They also founded the Front d'Union Democratique whose President was Adjo Bocco Ignace. (It was told that on his way back from the Congress of FUD in Parakou in 1974 President Kerekou approached him with the offer to join the government. Adjo agreed and was appointed as the Prefet of the Northern town of Parakou. As Prefet he insulted a northern traditional king, accusing him of being a remnant of feudalism and reportedly hit him. Rumors in Benin tell that Adjo's immediate illness and his untimely death a year or so later was a retaliation for this act by traditional medicine men.)

A far more crucial factor for the radicalization of the Kerekou regime than any other group is the so called group of Ligeaures. It appears, that practically all core members of this group are from the Dassa-Savalou, Save region, and that all or practically all of them resided as students in Paris in the 1960's, lived there during the 1968 May "evenements," and returned to Dahomey immediately afterwards. We may recall that the May events of 1968 in Paris started as a student protest against University regulations and

snowballed into a student-worker mass movement against the regime of General De Gaulle. From interviews with various people in Benin it appears that this group of students were isolated or isolated themselves from other Dahomean students in Paris, developed a strong group-cohesion, and finally were affected by the May events, as well as by the general intellectual atmosphere that African students in Paris absorbed in any case. On their return to their country they continued radical activities which the French events prepared them for. We must also recall that the Dassa-Savalou, Save region was the one customarily raided by the pre-colonial Dahomey Kingdom. The traditional resentment against the Fon of Abomey, as well as the lack of traditional contact with the Northerners, may have contributed both to their group solidarity in Paris and to their hostility to the socio-political environment they found upon returning to Dahomey.

The core Ligeurs became members of the Central Committee of the Popular Revolutionary Party of Benin. They were Simon Ifede Oguma , Joseph Degla, Gratien Copo-Chichi, Francis Codgo Azodobehou, Guirigissou Gado, and Philip Akpo all from the Dassa-Savalou, Save region, alongside syndicalists such as Romain Vilon Guezo from Abomey and FUDists such as Armand Monteiro, and Ligeurs from the North such as Mama Sanu Gomina, and strong supporters of Kerekou in the military such as Captain Martin Azonhiho.

Ideologues of all three categories were present in the country for many years, but only two years after Kerekou's access to power they arrived at shaping a regime. In October 1972, when he took over, Kerekou was not a Marxist, (if he has ever become one), nor has his regime become at once Marxist. Kerekou, and probably several of his fellow officers decided about

the 1972 coup in light of the actual situation as they perceived it, and in reaction to that situation, not because they had a plan to impose a new ideology on the country. Kerekou is said to have agreed to lead the coup in 1972 on condition that he would stay in power, which would not be returned to civilian leadership. After the coup, Kerekou and other officers gathered some 500 people to consult them about the direction that the new order is to take. One of the documents submitted at this meeting was that of the militant Kpanlingan group that included Guy Hazoume and Bathelemy Owens. Other documents were also submitted, including one by the Ligueurs. Kerekou's speach on November 30,1972, was a synthesis of sorts of these documents in a sense that it expressed their joint opposition to foreign domination. He said among other things that: "The basic characteristic and the prime source of our country's backwardness is foreign domination. The history of this domination is that of political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural alienation and the blossoming of inter-regional and inter-tribal contradictions." Although the Dahomean radio immediately became "The Voice of the Revolution", the government became "The Military Council of the Revolution", Dahomey established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, Lybia and North Korea and the new regime received the blessings of Guinea's socialist President Sekou Toure, still in a June 1973 interview Colonel Kerekou stated: "Our earnest desire is that the Dahomean revolution be authentic. It should not burden itself by copying a foreign ideology. You see" he said to an interviewer," we do not want communism, or capitalism, or socialism, We have our own Dahomean social and cultural system which is our own." Until 1974 the change that had taken place vis a vis the past was in the composition of leadership and in the tone of the government. The former political leaders and power brokers

were blocked out of government positions, and so were all the senior officers that played central political roles in the past, Soglo, Aho and Alley. The tone was changed to a more radical, militant and revolutionary one, but not yet to a marxist one. There was also a call for the reassessment of Dahomey's treaties with other countries, which meant specifically France, and for the establishment of new diplomatic relations.

In the same vein, Kerekou also called for the creation of a new economic block, a Benin Union, of Nigeria, Dahomey and Togo. A six man delegation headed by foreign minister Michel Alladaye was dispatched to Lagos to discuss the issue. Kerekou also appointed a commission to review the agreements of economic, cultural and military cooperation "with certain friendly countries" specifically France. In an effort to show a break with the past, Dahomey sent only a symbolic representation to the November 1972 meeting of the French dominated Council d'Entente, and withdrew its candidacy for membership in the Fracophone West African Economic Community (CEAO).

However all these moves proved insufficient to silence the radical elements, and calm the spirits in the country. Looking back in time we may notice that in Dahomey since independence about a year and a half to two years was customarily needed for the spirits to boil and eventually bring about a political change. The pattern seemed to continue after 1972. By January-February 1974 there were student demonstrations and strikes. Before that already in the summer of 1973 conflicts between Captain Nestor Beheton (Minister of Posts and Telecommunications) and Major Richard Rodriguez (Cotonou Port Authority Commisioner) were heading toward a strike of workers at the Port. To quell the trouble both officers were

removed from their respective posts. On February 28, 1973 the "Voice of the Revolution" reported that Colonel Alphonse Alley, Major Jean Baptist Hacheme, Major Ibrahim Chabi as well as several NCOs and civilians were arrested for attempting to assassinate some of the young officers of the army and take over the government. The French were accused of instigating the plot. On May 22, 1973 the three principal accused were sentenced to twenty-five of years hard labor. In April 1974, in an attempt to mute student unrest some 180 local student organizations out of some 300, were banned by the government. In the summer of 1974 the militant FUD held the conference in Parakou, another step toward probable unrest in the country.

Thus by the summer of 1974 the prospects for further troubles were evident. The banning of student unions did not stop them from expressing their dissatisfactions, without French support Dahomey's economic conditions could not but further deteriorate as high hopes for assistance from the neighboring oil-rich Nigeria were frustrated, and the Ligeurs continued to press for a complete turn-about as the only available option. Finally Kerekou gave in to them and on November 30 1974 he proclaimed socialism for Dahomey. "We declare that the only historic and just way of development is socialism and that it is this doctrine that the people of Dahomey have irreversibly chosen as of November 30, 1974..." And he added in obvious reference to his remarks some months earlier: "Some of our fellow countrymen can say that Marxism-Leninism is not an authentic Dahomean doctrine. Such people are only deceiving themselves because Marxism-Leninism comprises universal laws..."

The Ligeurs in fact received a free hand to reorganize the country.

They went to the government library and checked out the constitutions of socialist countries and used them as guides for a radical reform of institutions and practices of Dahomey. A National Political Bureau was formed (to become later the single Revolutionary Party), political commissioners were appointed to each province, and committees for the defense of the revolution were created in work places. Subsequently school textbooks were withdrawn and only specific Xeroxed pages from them were allowed to be used in schools. The schoolyear was reorganized, and the same was done to the entire educational system. In November 1975 Republic of Dahomey became the People's Republic of Benin, further emphasizing the break with the past.

In January 1975 Finance Minister Janvier Assogba found the documents related to the Kovacs affair which implicated several officials in important positions and Mathieu Kerekou as well. Assogba proposed to discuss the matter with Kerekou and foreign minister Michael Alladaye volunteered to mediate between them. But instead he helped to arrest Assogba, who is still in jail, for an attempted coup. In March 1975 former President Zinsou was condemned to death in absentia for alledgedly being behind this attempted coup and in June 1975 Minister of Interior (a Lieuguer supporter) Captain Aikpe was shot to death when Kerekou allegedly caught him making love to Kerekou's wife in a car. In October 1975 another "full scale plot" to reinstate Zinsou was crushed and eleven of the accused plotters were condemned to death later. None of these sentences were carried out.

It is difficult for this author to confirm or deny the actuality of these and other plots such as the January 1977 abortive coup when a group of mercenaries landed at the airport and after a while were forced to retreat.

It is clear however that opposition to the regime among Dahomeans in Europe is strong, well organized and active. There is for example the Parti Democratic Dahomeen (PDD) headed by Zinsou and operating from Paris and Lome and probably financially supported by Gabon and France. Another is the Bruxelles based Movement de la Renovation du Dahomey whose leaders are Gratien Pognon, Dahomey's former Ambassador to Belgium, and Amadou Assouma both of whom were probably behind the 1977 airborn coup attempt.

The abortive January 1977 coup had the opposite of the intended effect of its planners. Instead of bringing about an uprising in the country against the government, it provided an opportunity for the government to rally the people behind it against its enemies. The expulsion of some 10,000 Dahomean citizens by Gabon, the African Country accused by the Benin government to have instigated the abortive coup, and their arrival in Benin, contributed to a sense of solidarity with the chased and persecuted citizens. In May 1977 the third stage of the Dahomean Revolution was reached, following the coup of 1972 and the Marxist proclamation of 1974. This new stage was the publication of a draft constitution by the Party. Subsequently, in November 20, 1979, 336 "commissaires du Peuple" were elected to the Revolutionary Assembly which in turn elected Mathieu Kerekou as President of the Republic on February 7, 1980.

The revolutionary fervor continued until early 1981. By that time it became clear that revolutionary slogans did not eliminate corruption, nor did the nationalization of enterprises bring about greater productivity. The opposition to the reformed educational system has also grown, and doubts emerged about the goodwill of Colonel Khadafi, who gave $5 million in aid

in 1980, and the likelihood of Soviet and other East European aid for other than military purposes was also doubtful. On April 19, 1981 the three former Presidents were freed, in September Kerekou visited Paris and re-opened relations with France. In January 1982 educational reforms were instituted and in April state and parastatal enterprises were reorganized for greater efficiency. In January 1983 the French President Mitterand payed a visit to Benin. One of the ways of skillful liberalization by Kerekou was the reorganization of the government, to the effect of squeezing out several Ligeaurs (i.e. appointing them Ambassadors and Prefets) and strengthening the more moderate elements (Owens and Baba Moussa) and technocrats (Bouraina Taofiqui, Ayayi Manasse, Zul Kifl Salami) in the government.

Chapter 5

What Are The Prospects For Change?

After the 1972 coup the new military rulers sought ways to break with France, in order to comply with the policy that the various factions seemed to have agreed upon. The dependence on France was strong politically, economically and culturally. To substitute for the anticipated economic loss, the regime turned to prospering, post-civil-war Nigeria; politically the regime intended to diversity foreign ties; and culturally the Kerekou regime sought to develop its own wealth by, for example, encouraging the teaching and the use in school of all the national languages, and by changing the curriculum and the system of examinations. The radicalization of the regime in 1974 merely infused a specific content to the basic direction adopted in 1972. The strengthening of economic ties with Nigeria failed in the early stages of contacts. It is in part because although Dahomey needed Nigeria, Nigeria did not need the burden that Dahomey would be added to its budget. Also, the rapproachment with Nigeria merely strengthened the hands of the conservative Yoruba traders in Porto Novo and with that their political weight, which the radicals did not favor.

After the failure of rapprochement with Nigeria, the post 1974 Benin government turned to the Eastern block countries because of the ideological ties, and because th Soviet model of developement and infrastructure seemed

instrumental in the eyes of the radicals. Consequently, not only Marxist slogans, and the marxist doctrine was to be introduced as learning material in all spheres of life, but the socialist countries' constitution was largely copied and similar political, social and eonomic institutions were established. It was also hoped that financial aid and assistance would be forthcoming from the same sources.

By 1981 it became quite clear that economic aid and assistance from the Soviet Union would not be forthcoming, that the Soviet type economic infrastructurs did not function satisfactorily in Benin, that the educational system did not provide the expected results, and that, in a general sense, the conversions of Beninese to Marxism is a more difficult task than imagined at the outset. Consequently Kerekou started a process of liberalization. He turned to renew the old ties with France, reformed the economic infrastructure and largely reversed educational reforms.

While much has changed since 1981 two important elements of the radical regime have not. One is the basic political structure of institutions and the other is the Marxist slogans and vocabulary. The basic political structure as prescribed by the 1977 Constitution remained practically intact. There is still a single revolutionary party, there is still the structural submission of every political institution, including the army, to the party, there is still only one newspaper, the official one Ehuzu, and there are still political commissaries throughout the country. The slogans, the marxist vocabulary, are still there too both in official pronouncements, speeches and meetings of the various Fronts of women, laborers, etc. as well as in the appelation "camerade" at least in the main cities. Furtheremore, in international forums Benin has remained loyal to the radical camp, or, in

principle at least, to the non-aligned Third World.

One must add however that neither the 12 year-long Kerekou rule, nor the 24 years since independence have altered or could have altered the ethnic composition of the country. The infusion of ideology did not eliminate ethnicity, it rather produced a new type of dominant dychotomy between believers and non-believers in the Party Line, between Marxists and non-Marxists. The overtly and emphatically Marxist stance of the regime merely reduced the efficacy and the scope of the ethnic weapon. It does not mean that the ethnic affiliation of this or another office holder is irrelevant; it meerly means that whether he is a Ligeur or not, a technocrate or ideologue, a Marxist or a non-Marxist tends to be more relevant in the present atmosphere than the ethnic affiliation. But if political competition, democracy, would return tomorrow, the ethnic affiliation would at once return to prominance. Most importantly, the last two decades did not eliminate the deep cleavage between the North and the rest of the country. It is inconceivable that a politician from the south, representing a political party in open elections, would be considered in the North even today other than a southern politician . All past attempts at the creation of a single party in the country, and there were numerous attempts to do so under non-marxist civilian leadership, were attempts at coalitions between regional political leaders and hence failed. The present single party is not a coalition of regions but, is, and is seen, as an eclectic body of ideologues. The marxist slogans used by the regime are foreign and largely meaningless to vast segments of the population. When in the 1970's the regime went out to insult a traditional leader, when they arrested cult practitioners, (the feticheurs), when they restricted the trading activities of

Yoruba merchants, then there was opposition to the regime, to its anti-Dahomean ideological stand and to its inconsiderate practitioners. But when liberalization in most of these spheres set in when those acts and practices stoped and only a political skeleton and the vocabulary were left, and the various ethnic groups could live side by side in largely self-governed communities, then Marxists sloganeering ideology turned irrelevant.

This does not mean that the regime enjoys a wholehearted support of the population at large. However it does mean that when a potential political leader, a Maga or an Apithy, cannot say to potential supporters: "Look, you are submitted to a southern, or northern, domination; vote for me, support me in order for you to rule yourselves", but only that they are submitted to a Marxist domination. In response, the vast majority of the illiterate population tends to shrug its collective shoulders.

Nevertheless, a change of the regime is possible and is even likely because there are deep cleavages and rivalries within the ruling circles, and the balancing of ambitions, interests, and wills, is becoming more and more difficult. An attempted coup may occur any day, carried out by one or another group of young officers. But it is unlikely that such a change would lead to greater democratization. The outcome can be either a left-wing or a right wing dictatorial regime. At the moment Benin is an authoritarian country, freedoms are limited, there are still a few political prisoners, and several people had died in jails in the last 12 years. But there have been no wholescale executions in the country, and there is no terror on the streets. Kerekou is not a model of a democratic leader, but neither is he the like of Idi Amin, Bokassa, or Mobutu. Thus a change might be for the worse.

It is in the U.S.'s interest at the moment to overlook the voting behaviour of Benin in international organizations as well as the Marxist vocabulary at home, and support continued liberalization within the country. The Kerekou regime survived because it has been flexible. It has been flexible enough to absorbe radical elements when it proved necessary and then to absorbe moderate elements when it appeared possible. The disadvantages of its flexibility that none of the factions can be victorious, which for a few, especially among the junior officers, may be the ultimate aim. However the use of Marxist slogans, the constitutional commitment to socialism, and Benin's international stand as a "progressive" state does seem to the radicals to serve their ultimate aim, liberalization within the country notwithstanding. Denationalization of enterprises, encouragement of foreign private investment, the almost free hand given to the Yoruba traders can be seen by radicals as temporary and instrumental means at the present stage of Benin's economic development and ultimately ehnhancing their strive toward socialism. Such policies may seem to result from discussions among "camarades" within the Revolutionary Party. But if the "camarade" disappears, and with it the revolutional party dissolves, the very same liberal policies would be likely to be seen by the radicals in an entirely different light, one of neo-colonial machinations.

Chapter 6

A Summary

Ethnic and regional differences have been little in evidence in Benin since Kerekou's takeover in 1972. This is mainly because under the present regime there is no open political competition (elections) in which regional leaders mobilize sections of populations against the prospective or actual domination by a leader from another region. The roots of such negative attitudes towards other regions reach back in time to the slave trade, to ensuing regional wars, and to colonial times. There are no such historical memories towards either the military or the Marxist ideology. A return to civilian rule and open democratic competition would assure the reemergence of ethnic hostilities unless all candidates for the Presidency could be seen by the popultion as ethnically neutral. Such an eventuality is unlikely if the electoral competition is genuinely open..

The predominant role of the military in the government and in the country minimizes ethnic conflict; ideology, manipulated by the revolutionary party, minimizes the likelyhood of strikes and demonstrations customarily instigated by militant, radical elements. The result is a modicum of political stability.

Divisions of views within the army on policies and the ambitions of some junior officers to attain power exist and they continue to be a threat

to the regime. The controling of junior officers and the maneuvering in a maze of views, are probably major preoccupations of the President alongside the neutralization of the influence of the disgruntled expatriate Beninese and their supporters in the country.

The influence of Lybia and the Eastern bloc countries within the government of Benin appear to be minimal. Toward the end of 1980 Khadaffi gave a cheque of $10 million to Benin after the announcement by Lybia in October of the same year that Kerekou converted to Islam and became Ahmed Kerekou. Kerekou probably did not convert, his first name is still Mathieu, and Lybia's relations with the Benin government are at best cordial. The Soviet Union provides scholarships to Beninese students, but the latter prefer to study in France, their radicalism notwithstanding. The Ligeurs are more pro-Chinese than they are pro-Soviet and the pro-Soviet elements among students admire the assumed achievements of the Soviet economic development and its slogans of socialism, rather than the Soviet politics, its leadership, or its policies toward Africa. It should be noted that Benin's major foreign aid sources are France, West Germany and Canada in that order, all western countries, and not the Soviet Union.

Kerekou would seem to have few scrupules about changing Benin's international orientation if there were no internal constraints for doing so. A change in international orientation would immediately strengthen the hands of the radicals and threaten the Kerekou regime from the left. Benin's radical international stand and its use of radical slogans facillitates the the steps that Kerekou takes toward liberalization and moderation. This internal liberalization and moderation may be promoted by greater amounts of western foreign aid and assistance for specific economic projects, toward

updating the educational system and by supporting cultural activities such as teaching the English language. These in turn may eventually lead toward the reduction of the radical rhetoric internally and internationally as well.

Chapter 7

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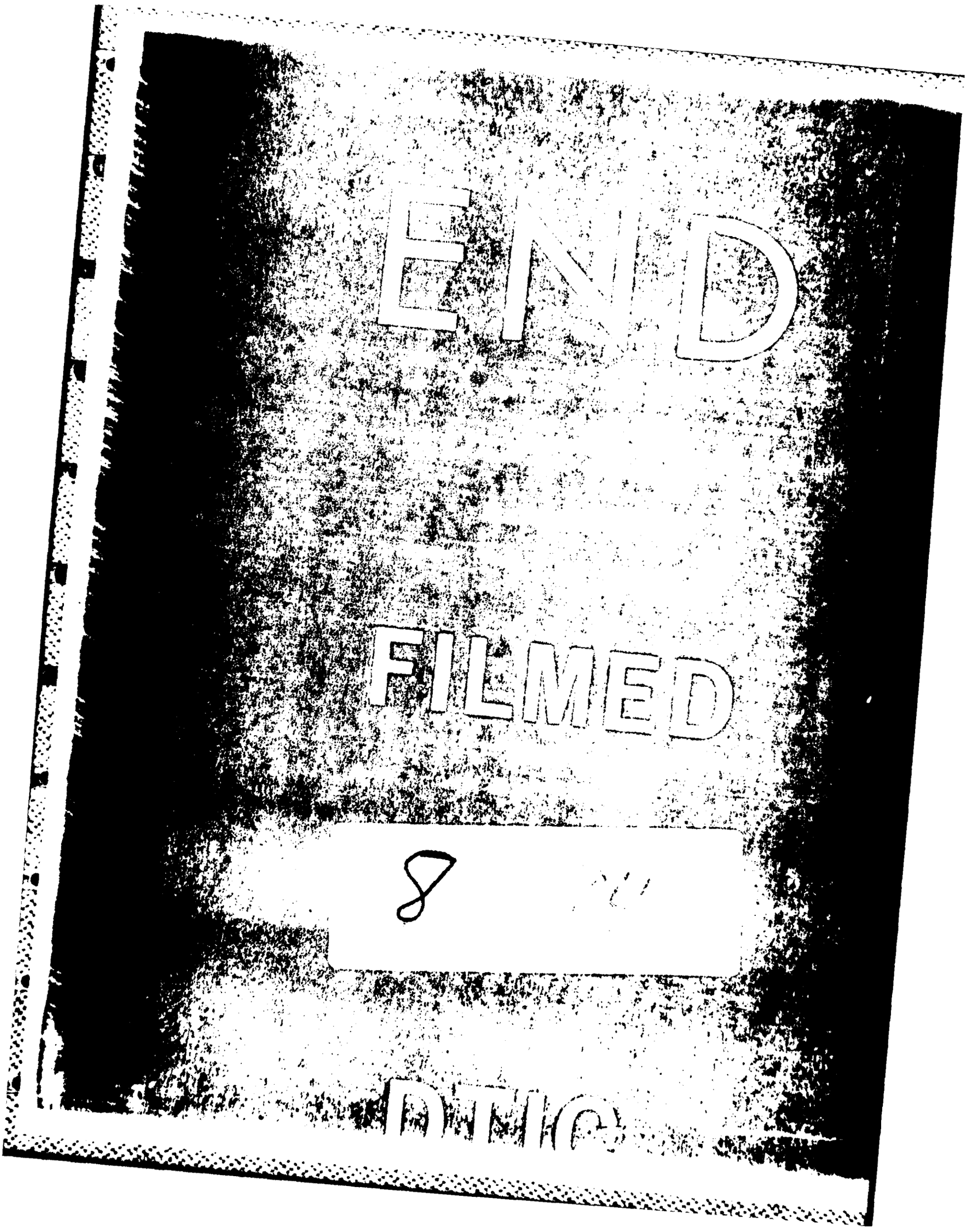
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